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Christmas Stars

BY

ANNA E. WILLIAMSON

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CHRISTMAS STARS

A Playlet In One Act

BY ANNA E. WILLIAMSON

SCENE—The living room of a cosy American home, with easy chairs, piano, and a little girl's chair, in which is seated a large doll.

TIME—Two days before Christmas.

CHARACTERS

ROBERT MACEY—Aged about thirty-five, very much in love with his wife.

ALICE MACEY—Very much in love with her husband.

BOB—Their eldest son, aged twelve.

MARY—Their daughter, aged ten.

TOM—An eight-year-old.

TWINS, JACK and ALICE, aged six.

A MAN—In laborer's clothes; has no speaking part.

NELLIE—Mrs. Macey's younger sister, a vivacious, sunshiny girl.

MAGGIE—A little waif, about ten years old.

PROPERTIES

A Christmas tree with some device in which it can stand upright, securely. A box of stars, made of gold paper, three inches from point to point. Fasteners in topmost point by which they can be attached to tree. Piano on stage. A large doll and toys with which the children can busy themselves.

The purpose of this little play is that it should be absolutely homelike and natural. The characters, when not speaking, should act exactly as they would in their own homes, and, above all, should not be mechanical in their parts.

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CHRISTMAS STARS

(Husband, reading newspaper. Wife, embroidering. Suddenly, she puts down her work, steals up behind him, and reaching over his head, takes away his paper.)

Wife Don't read, dear. I want to talk to you before the children come home. They will soon be back from Aunt Hattie's. Dear old soul, how pleased she will be with her Christmas basket. I only hope she will enjoy using the goodies as much as we did, getting them ready for her. If only Bob didn't upset his sled on the way down there! He promised to be careful, though, and I think he will be, for he seemed very eager that everything should arrive in good condition.

Husband You can depend on Bob. I don't know that I ever saw a little chap as anxious as he is to do things for people. He's all boy, not a bit goody-goody, but he certainly has a heart too big for his little body.

Wife That's what I want the children to be,—unselfish and kind. Robert, and that leads up to the very subject that's weighing on my mind. It's about a new scheme of decoration for the Christmas tree.

Husband (taking out his watch) Time for it to be here, isn't it? Well, what's the matter? Suppose when you came to look over the shiny old ornaments of other years, you found half of them broken. Is that it?

Wife No, that isn't it, Bob! To tell the truth, I don't want to use any of the 'shiny old ornaments' at all. I have an entirely different idea.

Husband Out with it! How much is it going to cost? (Hand in pocket.)

Wife Oh, Bob! (She kisses the top of his head.) There, you don't deserve it, but I just can't harden my heart against you! Now don't laugh or say one word till I get through. Bob, why can't we decorate the tree with stars and nothing else, and have it understood that each child who does some generous, thoughtful little deed, may have the privilege of hanging one star on the tree? That means a sort of rivalry in doing good. The children will be so anxious to see it filled, that they will be the busiest little human Kindnesses in town. You see, Bob, I fear we are getting away from the real, true, Christmas spirit. We are losing sight of much that made old-fashioned Christmas worth while. The children think just of the glitter and the fun, and not of the real Christian meaning of Christmas. Here is a box of stars. Don't you think a tree sparkling full of them would be simply glorious?

(She takes from top of piano, a large box, removes cover, and reveals interior filled with three-inch stars made of gold-paper. Each has a tiny hanger in topmost point, by which it may be attached to tree. They examine them, and Husband nods approval.)

Husband. Clever as usual, little woman. And now let ME have MY say! Christmas of late years, seems to be largely a matter of selfishness. It isn't sensible and it isn't happy. It is just a system of give and take. If any one unexpectedly makes us a gift, we are all upset because we haven't one to give in exchange. If anything costly comes our way, we feel that we must return the exact value. You, for one, go without things you really need, to give your friends presents that half of them don't care for. It's a sort of a revised version of wanting bread and getting a stone. There's a certain person I could name who's probably lying awake nights puzzling out what to give you. In the end, she will buy you something you will lay aside in the deepest, darkest drawer, and will never use. Whereas, if she gave you, four twenty-five cent traycloths, or half a dozen Turkish towels, (eighteen cents apiece, reduced from twenty-five cents, as a sale advertised in tonight's paper, says,) or even, a box of plain everyday handkerchiefs, without any filigree work or whatever you call it, on the borders, you would be overjoyed! Yes, little wife, your idea of the Christmas spirit is all right, and I vote with you. Let's carry it out!

(They examine the stars, and as they do so, are interrupted by a ring at the bell. Husband leaves the room, returns, saying: "Yes, right this way. Set it down in here." A man enters, dressed in rough, outdoor clothes, carrying a huge Christmas tree. Man helps husband set it snugly in a base, while wife steadies it. There is a sudden hubbub and five children burst into the room, in street dress. They shriek with joy at sight of the Christmas tree. Exit man.)

All the children. Oh, our Christmas tree! our Christmas tree!

Bob, (spying the box). What's in this box? Oh, see the stars! Aren't they beauties? Where's all the other things, Mother? Can I help tie them on?

Mother. Listen, dearies. Daddy and I have decided that we won't use the other things, this Christmas. We will decorate the tree with just these stars. Now, whenever one of you does something kind and sunshiny, that will make someone happy, you may tie one of these stars anywhere you like, on the branches. I hope we can use the whole box full, before Christmas night.

Little Mary. Mother, there will be more stars on the tree than there are stars in the sky, won't there?

(Ring at bell. Children all hustle to door. Then return.)

Bob. Mother, there is a poor man outside. He is cold and hungry. You ought to see him shiver. He asked for something to eat.

Father. If you think he is worthy, give him that old coat of mine that hangs in the closet.

Mother. I will, and we have plenty of leftovers, tonight. I will ask him into the kitchen, where it is warm, while he eats.

(Mother leaves the room, smiling.)

Mary. Daddy, could it be the Christ-child in disguise?
Father. In olden days, people believed that any stranger might be what they called, 'an angel unawares.' Who knows?

Mary. If I was an angel, I would always want to come back to earth at Christmas time, and touch peoples' hearts, so they would be good.

Father. That much you can do, just as a very mortal little girl. What did Aunt Hattie say about the basket, children?

(Children all excited. They crowd about their father.)

Little Alice, (cuddling the doll, which she has taken from the chair). She cried!

Little Jack. She opened the package first, and when she saw the nice shawl Mother knit for her, she put it right on and snuggled in it,—so! (He illustrates.)

Tom. She said she would have the nicest Christmas dinner in town. She said everything looked good enough to eat RAW!

Mary. Daddy, did you know, that on Christmas afternoon, we are all going to different houses to sing carols? Mother thought it would be nice. She told us about some sick people and old ladies who would like to hear us?

Father. Suppose you practise the carols on me, first.

(The children go to the piano, and Mary plays a little Christmas song, while they sing in clear, childish treble. As they finish, their Mother returns, looking at them, proudly, and fondly.)

Bob. Mother, you must put the first star on the tree, because you fed the poor man.

Tom. Daddy must put the next one, because he gave him his coat.

All, (shouting. Yes! Yes!

(Mother, assisted by Father, puts star on the tip-top of the tree. All survey it with interest.)

Bob. Don't you think people do more kind things at Christmas, than they do any other time?

Mother. Yes, dear, there are more opportunities.

Tom. Mother, can we put stars on for the kind things we have done today, and not wait?

Mother. Yes, Tom, did you do something kind, today?

Tom. I didn't, but Bob did. On our way home from school, there was a little girl who wanted to skate, but she couldn't get her skates on. Her fingers were so cold, she couldn't work the snap. So Bob said, 'Here, let me do it for you,' and the little girl said, 'Thank you.' Then she stood up, and they were on tight, so she skated off.

Father. Good boy, Bob. Choose your star and where you want to put it.

(Bob eagerly does so and it shines brightly on the branches.)

Mother. Each of you may put a star on the tree because of taking the basket to Aunt Hattie.

(The five children cluster about the tree, select the stars and attach them.)

(Again there is an alarm at the bell. The children flock to the door, and return, joyfully escorting Nellie, their mother's youngest sister. Greetings follow. Nellie's arms are filled with packages. She puts them down, and looks approval over the happy little family group.)

Nellie. I had a real 'Christmassy' adventure on the way here. I knew these kiddies would be just crazy to hear about it, so I've stopped in to tell them. Don't ask me to stay. This finishes my Christmas shopping and I must hie me home to tie up stacks and stacks of gifts.

Children, (in chorus). Oh, tell us, tell us, Aunt Nellie!

Nellie. About a block down the street, a regular little ragamuffin of a girl stepped out from behind a tree, and said to me, 'Lady, kin youse tell me where Santer Claus lives?' I was so surprised that I didn't know what to say for a moment, and to give myself time to think, I asked her why she supposed he lived in this section. She told me a queer story. I can never repeat it in her words, so I'll translate it, as well as I understood it. It's a pitiful case of poverty; father drinking, younger children at home, and your imagination can supply the details. But this child firmly believes in Santa Claus. She went downtown and had her pinched little nose up against a store window, looking at the dolls and toys, when she heard a commotion, and turned around in time to see the good old Saint, himself. She said she knew it was he, because he looked exactly like all the pictures she had ever seen of him. The part she couldn't understand was that he had boards hanging over his shoulders with words painted on, but she couldn't read them. I guessed from her description that he was what Bob here would call 'a sandwich man' advertising a special sale in some store. Well, the poor child followed him up and down until finally he disappeared into a store. I suppose his day's work was done and I must say it was a hard way to earn his miserable dollar or so. So she stood and stood waiting for 'Santer Claus' to come out, and of course, he didn't. At last, chilled to the bone, she asked some man who was passing where 'Santer Claus' lived, and in a spirit of fun or sarcasm, he said, 'Why up on Nelson Avenue, near the Park.' She walked all the way here, and I daresay, she is outside now, partiently waiting, never dreaming she's the victim of a joke.

Mother. Oh, how pitiful. Bob, get into your coat and hurry. If you find her, bring her here. Nellie, what did you tell her?

Nellie. I told her I couldn't give her the exact address of Santa, himself, but if she would wait a little while, I might send some of his kind relatives to her. My arms were so filled I simply couldn't get into my purse. I knew that you and Robert would do the Santa act, when I told you about her, and I see I'm not mistaken.

(Little Bob in cap and coat, hastily leaves the room. The other children call Nellie's attention to tree.)

Tom. Aunt Nellie, don't you think that's a dandy Christmas tree?

Nellie. I do, indeed, and what are these 'twinkle, twinkle, little stars' for?

Mary. That's our kindness tree. Mother says whenever we do anything generous and kind we may hang a star on the tree. So we're trying to get it just loaded with stars before Christmas.

Nellie. One, two, three, four, five, six, stars already! That's a good beginning. What do they mean?

Mary. Mother fed a poor, hungry man, just a little while before you came, and we each put a star on because we took a basket of things to Aunt Hattie.

Nellie. AUNT Hattie, indeed. I feel flattered. Isn't she the old lady whom you're trying to keep out of the poorhouse, Alice?

Mother. Yes. She comes of a fine old family, you know, and her greatest fear is that she may have to end her days in the poorhouse. Their money was lost in some way, and now in her old age, nobody wants to bother with Aunt Hattie. She asked the children to call her that. She thinks so much of them. We are trying to get up a fund to place her in the Old Ladies Home. She would be quite comfortable there, and is willing to go. But the poorhouse! Never!!

(Bob returns, leading a shabby, unkempt little girl.)

Bob. She says her name is Maggie, mother.

Mother, (taking her hand). So you are are the little girl who is looking for Santa Claus? Suppose you tell us all about it.

Maggie. There ain't much to tell. Ma, she sets an' cries all the time. There ain't nuthin' to eat only bread without butter on it. I've got a little brother an' sister. They ain't got nuthin' to play with an' nuthin' to wear, only jest what's on them. We useter have things, once. But pa, he drinks so. There ain't nuthin' left. Folks tell so much about this here Santer Claus. I thought mebbe I could tell him how things was with us, an' he might do somethin'. Ma could work, only she can't. She don't git enough to eat, an' she gits weak an' faint if she tries to do anything.

Mother, (appealing to father). Robert, what can we do? It's too late tonight to have anything delivered in the way of groceries or coal.

Mary, (pressing forward, eagerly). Oh, Mother, please, please, let me be little MISS Santa Claus! Let the poor folks come here for tonight, anyway, and they can sleep in my room.

Mother, (thoughtfully). There's the guest-room with two beds. I think that would be better. What do you say, Robert? Shall we have this family come here until we can make other arrangements for them?

Father. It's evidently an urgent case. We may never have a better chance to exemplify the 'inasmuch' principle.

Tom. What's the 'inasmuch' principle, Daddy?

Mary, (Very clearly and gravely). Why, don't you know, brother? Don't you remember when we had it in Sunday-school? It's what Jesus said:—'Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.'

Maggie, (turning and looking at the tree). Oh, ain't that a pretty tree? My little sister ain't never seen a Christmas tree. She's a cripple an' she can't walk. She can jest set by the winder all day, but there ain't much to see in our alley.

Baby Alice, (coming forward with her large doll). She can have my doll.

(She offers the doll to Maggie, who takes it almost reverently.)

Father. How old are your brother and sister?

Maggie. Jim is about as big as him, (pointing to Tom,) and Katie is like her. (Points to Alice.)

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Bob, junior. Where do you live, Maggie?

Maggie. The last house down in Droogan's Alley.

Mary. Oh, Mother, haven't I got some nice warm clothes that would fit her?

Aunt Nellie, (turning to Father). Here's where those blessed babes give their last possession away.

Father, (with decision). Well, while you two women put your heads together and plan the fate of these unfortunates, I will go home with Maggie and see what can be done about getting the family here for the night. There's enough of us to fit them out with decent garments for the time being, and tomorrow I can see some people on their behalf.

(Takes Maggie by the hand. They exit.)

Bob. Mother, you and Daddy together ought to put ALL the stars on the tree, because you are doing about a million good deeds.

Nellie. No, I believe I've got the best plan of all. We often hear it said that 'we are judged by our motives.' Now every one of these children is fairly bursting with ideas for making these poor people happy and why can't they put the stars on the tree for what they INTEND to do? By the time these folks arrive, the tree will be a perfect blaze of glory! I'm going to settle the whole thing in a jiffy and then (playfully) I shall search for the biggest star and hang it on, myself. If this woman proves worthy, I can place her as a working housekeeper. The Jenkins were telling me only today that they are going to employ one at their country place and there's a cosy little cottage on their land that they are getting in good shape for her. The country air would do wonders for that little cripple. Up goes my star and then I'll hurry along and stop at Jenkins on my way home and ask them to keep the position open, until they hear from me.

(Nellie laughing, pretends to search for biggest star, and at last seizes one and hangs it on tree. The children, shouting, dance about, hanging them until the branches are gay with stars. Nellie adjusts her wraps, and pointing to tree, says, merrily—)

Nellie. Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
What a sparkley thing you are!

(Nellie and Mother embrace, while the children still riot about the tree.)

CURTAIN.

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